The Subcommittee for Academic Matters Charter

The Subcommittee for Academic Matters (SAM) was a joint Rice–BCM committee that focused on making recommendations on how a merged Rice–BCM might successfully capture the academic benefits of a merger. The committee and its Research and Education subcommittees were composed of 32 scholars — deans, chairmen and faculty members — from Rice and BCM, five of whom were originally on the Rice Faculty Advisory Committee and became members of the Rice Faculty Merger Review Committee (FMRC).

The subcommittees concluded from their discussions and their reading of the reports of the Rice chairmen, the Rice Faculty Advisory Committee and the joint Rice–BCM faculty committee that there are an array of potential academic benefits that could be captured by a merger. In fact, SAM concluded there are far more potential benefits than could reasonably be captured. So SAM developed a skeletal process that would engage the faculty to come up with ideas, strategically pick the best ideas based on a transparent and rigorous peer review model, implement the selected ideas, and assess their success. The process SAM developed included both institutional strategic planning and engaging faculty to develop their ideas through request-for-proposal processes commonly used by federal funding agencies, and the processes recommended included rigorous and transparent peer review. The SAM report also recommended a structure for an Office of Integration that could manage these processes and the implementation of selected programs.

The SAM report made several contributions to the consideration of a Rice–BCM merger:

1. The SAM committees and their report brought together the reports of several faculty committees and confirmed their conclusions of the array of potential academic opportunities that could potentially be captured by a merger. A key point of SAM was the enthusiasm for potential benefits from both Rice and BCM faculty.
2. The SAM report made it clear that maximizing the capture of academic synergies would require resources; the engagement of faculty; a transparent and rigorous process to identify, review, select, implement and assess the best initiatives; and an administrative structure to manage the integration. These conclusions are similar to the FMRC’s conclusions regarding academic benefits, albeit that SAM went beyond the FMRC by recommending the skeleton of an administrative structure and a process, and SAM’s tone was perhaps more positive.
3. The Education and Research subcommittees identified the kinds of opportunities — as opposed to selecting specific academic areas — that could be captured, which gave a good sense of the range of activities that we might undertake without preselecting specific focus areas in order to ensure that focus areas were selected through a rigorous process.
4. The Education and Research subcommittees gave us information on the nature of the synergies that could be gained as well as some information on barriers to achieving them.
5. The SAM overarching committee developed a relatively detailed recommendation for an Office of Integration, including its functions and staffing. As was stated in the Sept. 25, 2009, letter, this recommendation would be seriously considered should a merger proceed.

It is important to recognize what the SAM committee was not, despite what has been inappropriately communicated by one person and despite mischaracterizations that have spread throughout our community. It also is important to correct a few mischaracterizations that have been made about the SAM committee and their report.

1. SAM was not “The committee charged with negotiating the merger” — its charge and conclusions were described above, and this characterization is simply ridiculous.

2. SAM was not charged with determining whether the potential synergies justified the risk of the merger. It would not have been appropriate for a Rice–BCM faculty committee to determine whether the synergies justify the risk, since the answer to that question might be different for each institution. In reality, SAM agreed with every faculty report with respect to there being a wide array of potential academic opportunities that would require resources and an administrative structure to capture. The energy being expended by Rice members on the Rice–BCM steering committee is aimed at determining whether conditions could be created that would allow us to capture some academic synergies, while not exposing Rice to unacceptable risk. No one on the Rice team has determined that the synergies justified any risk — only that there are synergies worth capturing if the risk can be managed. Members differ in their opinions and perhaps also with some faculty members regarding what the nature and extent of risks are and the degree that positive benefits can be captured.

3. SAM was not charged with developing a budget for capturing all the synergistic opportunities. In fact, doing so would have been unwise. First, there truly are a vast array of potential opportunities, each of which could be captured to different degrees with different levels of investment, depending on faculty leadership. Asking 32 people to develop such a budget or to select up front the specific areas would have most certainly led to an undesired outcome. SAM’s report used a National Science Foundation/National Institutes of Health model, coupled with strategic planning processes that could be undertaken after a merger that could allow faculty to come together to propose ideas that could be implemented within a specific budget guideline.

4. SAM did not produce a list of “fantasy” benefits as it has been characterized. The research and education committees produced a range of types of synergies and academic programs that could be undertaken that gave the Rice–BCM steering committee a sense of the wide range of things that could be done — some less expensive involving a few faculty and some that may require extensive investment. The SAM report made it clear that we could not expect to capture all the potential academic opportunities and that one challenge was to design a structure to most efficiently identify, select, implement and assess the best opportunities.
5. SAM did, in fact, discuss why some synergies have not occurred in the current environment despite what has been said. Those discussions are implicit in some of the recommendations, such as the Research Subcommittee’s discussion of an infrastructure for optimal integration and the Education Subcommittee’s discussion of academic calendars.

6. SAM did, in fact, take into consideration successful kinds of synergies between medical schools and the rest of their campuses that have occurred at other institutions and issues that have kept some synergies from developing. For example, some campuses have not captured the academic benefits of education synergies because of not having a mechanism to financially support medical school faculty in undergraduate education. SAM specifically discussed the importance of developing that kind of a model.